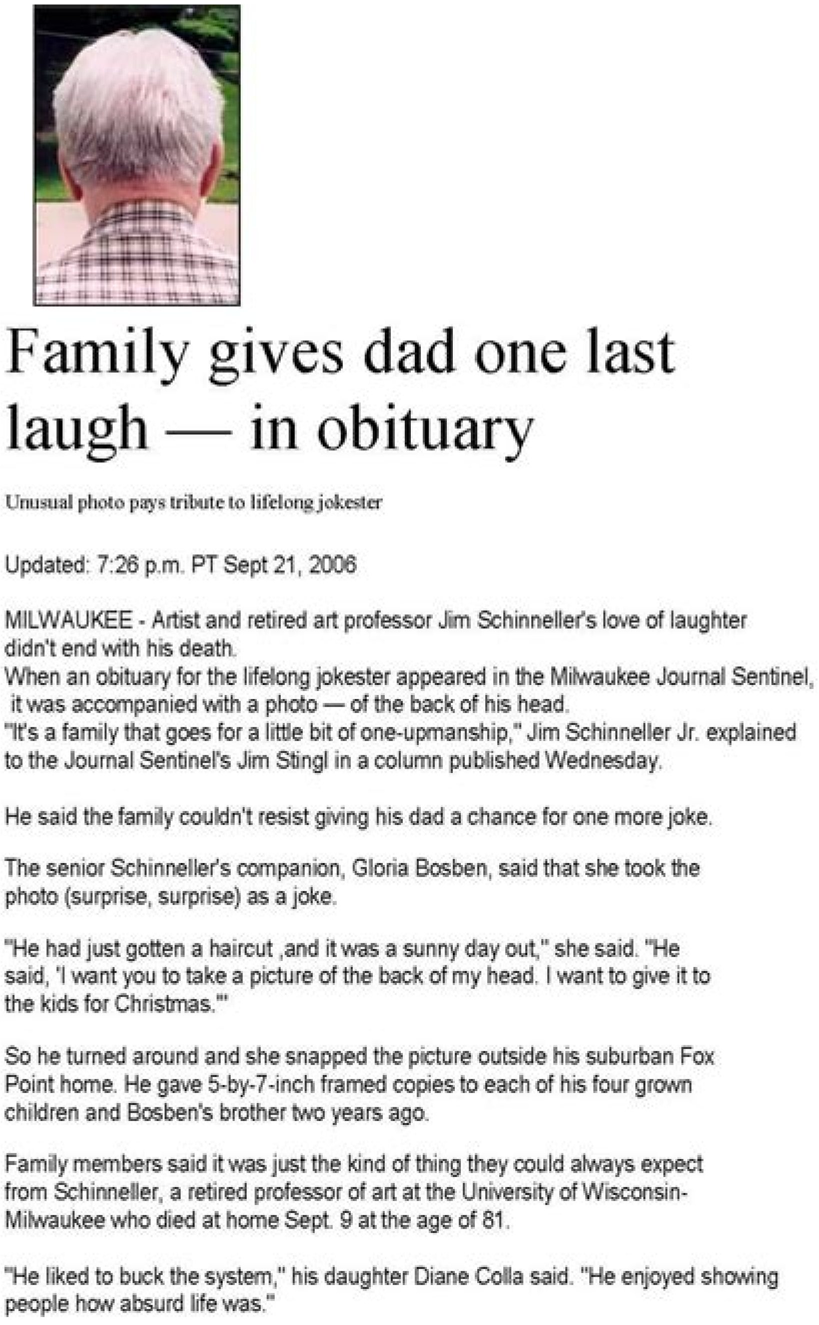
How To Write An Obituary



Family gives dad one last laugh — in obituary

Unusual photo pays tribute to lifelong jokester

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MILWAUKEE - Artist and retired art professor Jim Schinneller's love of laughter didn't end with his death.
When an obituary for the lifelong jokester appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, it was accompanied with a photo — of the back of his head.
"It's a family that goes for a little bit of one-upmanship," Jim Schinneller Jr. explained to the Journal Sentinel's Jim Stingl in a column published Wednesday.

He said the family couldn't resist giving his dad a chance for one more joke.

The senior Schinneller's companion, Gloria Bosben, said that she took the photo (surprise, surprise) as a joke.

"He had just gotten a haircut ,and it was a sunny day out," she said. "He said, 'I want you to take a picture of the back of my head. I want to give it to the kids for Christmas.'"

So he turned around and she snapped the picture outside his suburban Fox Point home. He gave 5-by-7-inch framed copies to each of his four grown children and Bosben's brother two years ago.

Family members said it was just the kind of thing they could always expect from Schinneller, a retired professor of art at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee who died at home Sept. 9 at the age of 81.

"He liked to buck the system," his daughter Diane Colla said. "He enjoyed showing people how absurd life was."

How to write an obituary is a question many face during challenging times. An obituary serves as a tribute to a loved one, celebrating their life and sharing their story with the community. Writing an obituary can feel like a daunting task, but with a clear structure and some thoughtful consideration, it can also be a meaningful way to honor a person's memory. This guide will walk you through the steps to effectively write an obituary, ensuring that you capture the essence of the individual you are commemorating.

Understanding the Purpose of an Obituary

Before diving into the writing process, it’s essential to understand the purpose of an obituary. An obituary is not just an announcement of someone's passing; it serves multiple functions:

- To inform the community about the individual's death.
- To celebrate and commemorate the life of the deceased.
- To provide details about memorial services or funerals.
- To allow family and friends to share their condolences.

Understanding these purposes will help you craft a more meaningful and respectful obituary.

Gathering Information

Writing an obituary requires accurate and relevant information about the deceased. Here’s a list of essential details to gather:

Basic Information

- Full name of the deceased (including nicknames, if applicable).
- Date and place of birth.
- Date and place of death.
- Age at the time of death.

Family Details

List the surviving family members and any predeceased family members. Consider including:

- Spouse or partner's name.
- Children's names, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

- Parents’ names.
- Siblings and their names.

Life Achievements and Contributions

Highlight significant accomplishments and contributions that defined the individual’s life. This may include:

- Education history.
- Career and notable achievements.
- Hobbies and interests.
- Volunteer work or community involvement.

Personal Anecdotes

Consider including personal stories or anecdotes that reflect the personality and spirit of the deceased. This adds a personal touch and makes the obituary feel more intimate.

Structuring the Obituary

An obituary should flow logically and be easy to read. Here’s a suggested structure:

Opening Statement

Start with a strong opening statement that includes the name, age, and date of death. You might also mention the place of death. For example:

“John Doe, 75, of Springfield, passed away on October 1, 2023, surrounded by family.”

Life Summary

Provide a brief overview of the deceased’s life, including their background, achievements, and contributions. This section can be a paragraph or two long.

Family Information

List surviving family members and any predeceased relatives in a respectful manner. This section can be straightforward, such as:

“John is survived by his wife, Jane Doe; children, Mary Smith and Robert Doe; and five grandchildren.”

Funeral or Memorial Service Details

Include information about any services that will be held in honor of the deceased. This should cover:

- Date and time of the service.
- Location of the service.
- Any specific requests, such as donations to a charity in lieu of flowers.

Closing Statement

End the obituary with a closing statement that reflects the deceased’s character or a meaningful quote. This can be a heartfelt message or a saying that resonates with their life.

Writing Style and Tone

When writing an obituary, it’s important to maintain a respectful and empathetic tone. Here are some tips for style:

- Use clear and concise language.
- Avoid jargon or overly complex terms.
- Be honest and authentic in your portrayal of the individual.
- Consider the audience and how they might connect with the content.

Finalizing the Obituary

Once you have drafted the obituary, take the following steps to finalize it:

Proofreading

Carefully proofread the obituary for spelling, grammar, and factual accuracy. It may be helpful to ask a trusted family member or friend to review it as well.

Choosing a Publication

Decide where to publish the obituary. Traditional options include local newspapers, while online platforms and social media can also be effective. Consider the preferences of the deceased and their family when making this decision.

Publication Costs

Be aware that some publications may charge for printing obituaries. Research the costs involved and budget accordingly.

Conclusion

Writing an obituary is a significant and emotional task that requires careful consideration and attention to detail. By following the steps outlined in this guide, you can create a heartfelt tribute that honors the life of your loved one. Remember that an obituary is not just a formality; it’s an opportunity to celebrate a life well-lived and to share that legacy with those who knew and loved them. Whether you choose to write a simple announcement or a detailed narrative, your words will serve as a lasting tribute to the individual’s impact on the world.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key components to include in an obituary?

An obituary should include the deceased's full name, age, date of birth and death, a brief biography, information about family members, funeral service details, and any memorial contributions.

How can I make an obituary more personal and meaningful?

Include personal anecdotes, hobbies, achievements, and favorite quotes or sayings of the deceased. Highlight their character and the impact they had on others.

What is the appropriate tone for writing an obituary?

The tone should be respectful and compassionate, balancing grief with celebration of the person's life. It can be formal or informal depending on the individual's personality and the family's wishes.

How long should an obituary be?

Typically, obituaries range from 150 to 300 words, but it can vary based on the publication's guidelines and the amount of information you wish to convey.

Are there any common mistakes to avoid when writing an obituary?

Common mistakes include using unclear language, omitting important details, being overly negative, and failing to proofread for errors.

Should I include a photo in the obituary?

Including a photo is often recommended as it adds a personal touch and helps readers connect with the deceased. Choose a clear and flattering image.

Where can I publish an obituary?

Obituaries can be published in local newspapers, online obituary websites, and social media platforms. Consider the preferences of the deceased and family for the best options.

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